

### Hinkle Returns to the Hardwood

Liberal's Scott Hinkle is returning to his roots. He is returning to the basketball court to be Liberal High School's head coach after Drew Gruver took a head coaching job at Winfield. Hinkle leaves his post as athletic director which he has held the past nine years.

A local committee picked Hinkle to be head coach this week and the USD 480 school board accepted that recommendation at a Thursday night meeting. There were two other candidates for the position.

Hinkle has seen the program from the perspective of a head coach from 1997-1999 and as an athletic director for the past nine years. He hired Gruver to be head coach after Gruver replaced Chris Davis for the 2008 season.

Hinkle took two of his three teams to state including a 16-7 team in 1997 and a 13-10 team in 1998. The 1999 team was 9-12 before Hinkle's departure as head coach. He went to Seward's women's program to assist Jim Littell and helped Littell lead the 2002 team to a 38-0 season and an NJCAA championship.

Gruver was 73-59 in six years as head coach and took teams to state in three of his six years. The team team has finished under .500 for the past three seasons.

Gruver's first year was 2008 when the Redskins were 19-4 overall and won their first WAC championship since 1995 with a 7-1 WAC record. That team lost to Bishop Carroll in the first round of the state tournament in an overtime heartbreaker. His second year saw the Redskins go 17-6 and return to state where they lost to Andover Central. That LHS team was 5-3 in the WAC. In his third year, the Redskins were 11-10 and 2-6 in the WAC. The 2011 team was 9-12 overall and 4-4 in the WAC. The 2012 team shrugged off a 3-11 start and won seven of their final eight games to advance to the state tournament where they would lose to Lansing. This year's LHS team was his worst going 7-14 but winning a playoff game at Maize South. LHS was 2-5 in the WAC.

Liberal loses six seniors from this season's team including leading scorer and rebounder J.J. Lewis who averaged 12 points and eight rebounds per game and point guard William Ross who averaged nine points per game. But he returns Elmer Quintana, Blake Stout, Trenton Hammond, Britton Abbott, Hayden Coker, and Jared Hasik with varsity experience.

There is certainly room for improvement in a program with good tradition. The Redskins haven't won a game at the state tournament since 1993 and have won the WAC just once since 1995.

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